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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Haiti: A Troubled Transition

Summary

Jean Bertrand Aristide's overwhelming victory in the 16 December election gives him a mandate to govern unmatched by any Haitian leader in this century. Aristide's adoption of moderate campaign themes--especially the need for "justice and integrity" in government, in contrast to his earlier calls for vengeance--and quick international recognition of the legitimacy of his victory should provide the new administration with some breathing space from the wary military and his bitter opponents on the right. The Army's ability to contain the far right prior to and during the election suggests that even hardline Duvalierists--Aristide's most powerful and strident enemies--are unlikely to move against the President-elect unless they believed the military condoned such action.

Aristide, nonetheless, faces several imposing obstacles, including a lack of administrative experience among his key advisers, the possibility of a National Assembly lead by the opposition, and a prostrate economy. We believe that Aristide would quickly revert to his leftist rhetoric or

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extra-constitutional actions if he is unable to make headway on his agenda. Should Aristide try to circumvent roadblocks by arming his own security force or thwarting the legislature's prerogatives, support for a military revolt or other moves to topple his regime would gain momentum.

Aristide will view US willingness to provide direct aid as an early test of Washington's good will. If aid is not forthcoming quickly Aristide, who is deeply suspicious of US intentions, almost certainly will complain openly that Washington is trying to undermine his government and may decide to signal his displeasure by curtailing cooperation on alien interdiction and counternarcotics programs, or making diplomatic overtures to Cuba.

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On 16 December, leftist priest Jean Bertrand Aristide won an overwhelming majority of the vote to become Haiti's first freely-elected president since the end of the Duvalier era in 1986. Aristide's National Front for Democracy and Change (FNCD) garnered some 67 percent of the vote; the coalition of his nearest rival, centrist politician Marc Bazin, collected less than 15 percent.¹ In contrast to the aborted November 1987 election, in which at least 34 voters died, the Haitian military provided ample security and the elections proceeded with little violence. International observers quickly confirmed that the balloting was generally free and fair. They, as well as Aristide's supporters, praised the military for protecting the process.

A Popular Mandate...

We believe the magnitude of Aristide's win and the quick international recognition of its legitimacy will be his most important assets in the run-up to his 7 February inauguration and over the early months of his tenure. In our judgment, the size of his victory provides him with a mandate to govern unmatched by any Haitian leader in this century. Press and other reporting indicate that he attracted support all over the country and from most

¹ Many legislative and local elections were forced to a runoff that will not be held until 20 January 1991.

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economic sectors, especially the poor and middle class who saw the 37 year-old priest as the only candidate representing a real departure from the politics of the three-decade long Duvalier era. Further, Aristide's strong oratory skills and reputation as an honest "man-of-the-people" galvanized support and insured a large turnout at the polls.² Prompt recognition of his victory and congratulatory messages from leaders in Latin America and Europe also have helped convince opponents to accept Aristide's victory at least for now.

Moreover, we believe that the voters' endorsement of Aristide's moderate, unsophisticated campaign themes will give the new administration a fair amount of breathing space as it begins the difficult task of governing. According to press reports, most Haitians are not expecting an economic "miracle," looking for the President-elect instead to bring integrity to their government. For example, at a rally following his victory, crowds in Port-au-Prince chanted "It's not for money, it's for dignity," underscoring popular near-term political expectations.

Aristide will have to act more promptly on some of his political promises, especially removing any influence of the far right in government and arresting or deporting notorious Duvalierist leaders. Even so, while he has continued to endorse bringing hardline Duvalierists to justice, Aristide has publicly urged moderation in dealing with political extremists.

...But Little Else

We expect, however, that the administrative inexperience of Aristide and his advisers and emerging divisions in his coalition will make forming a government difficult. Aristide has never managed any undertaking more substantial than a poor parish church.

² For a closer look at Aristide's background and leadership style, see Appendix.

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Apart from a lack of qualified personnel, the yet-to-be selected National Assembly could further complicate Aristide's efforts to develop and implement policies.³ The Haitian Constitution gives the two-house Assembly significant powers, including the ability to override presidential vetoes with a simple majority vote in each body. Although Aristide's FNCD is likely to do well in the legislative races, his coalition ran candidates for less than half of the seats and he would need to ally with another party to wield a majority. Furthermore, the constitution requires Aristide to select a Prime Minister--a position nearly equal in power to his own--from the majority party in the legislature. Without an alliance in the Assembly, Aristide will not be able to select the Prime Minister from among his own followers, unless no other party or coalition achieves a legislative majority. If neither his own nor another group can form an absolute majority, he would be free to choose from any party, after consulting with Assembly leaders. According to the constitution, the Prime Minister selects the Cabinet with the approval of the president and is empowered to enforce the Republic's laws.

Dealing with Rival Power Centers

In our view, Aristide's public assurances that he will not undertake a "witch-hunt" against his rivals indicates his clear understanding that the survival of his movement will hinge on his management of the military and far right. We believe Aristide's landslide victory and massive popular demonstrations in his favor have intimidated some among the Armed Forces and the Duvalierists. Nevertheless, Haitian political history is replete with examples of the populace shrinking from a confrontation with a smaller, better armed force. In November 1987, for example, only a few dozen thugs were able to halt the election without provoking any substantial public backlash.

The Armed Forces. The Armed Forces are suspicious of Aristide and his leftist advisers in particular, but they have adopted a wait-and-see posture toward the new government. Concerns are likely to be highest within the Haitian Defense Units and the Heavy Weapons Corps, where many troops have been closely tied to human rights abuses committed under former President Avril. For example, Evans Paul, the apparent winner of the Port-au-Prince mayor's race and a close Aristide associate, was severely beaten by soldiers following his arrest in 1989 for alleged

³ The National Assembly consists of a 27-member Senate and an 83-member House of Deputies.

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coup plotting and still walks with a limp. Despite these concerns, [REDACTED] Aristide's landslide victory has had a sobering affect on prospective coup-plotters in the military. In addition, most officers reportedly do not want to provoke the population, damage their growing image of professionalism, or jeopardize the expected influx of foreign military aid in the wake of a successful election. [REDACTED]

Aristide and his followers have been careful to send reassuring messages to the Armed Forces, but at the same time are considering measures that would put them at odds with military leaders, in our view. Three days after the election, the FNCD issued a press release congratulating the Army for the "positive example" the soldiers set during the balloting. Troops also were bolstered by popular displays of gratitude for the military's efforts; in his victory speech, Aristide said he would not purge the Armed Forces and more recently promised them a salary increase.

[REDACTED]

The Duvalierists. Although some moderate Duvalierists also appear to have adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward Aristide, hardliners appear resolved to prevent him from taking or staying in office. Presidential candidates identified with the moderate right and even rightwing extremist Roger Lafontant have congratulated Aristide and expressed a willingness to work with his government. Even so, [REDACTED] almost all Duvalierists fear that Aristide's followers will seek vigilante justice against them. Lafontant, despite his conciliatory words after the election, publicly vowed before the balloting to prevent Aristide from becoming president.

[REDACTED]

Aristide has urged his supporters not to seek personal revenge on the far right and called for national reconciliation, but we believe his goodwill will be limited to low-level officials who worked for the Duvalier regime. Aristide has indicated that he is committed to finishing Haiti's anti-Duvalierist "revolution," and days before the balloting, he promised that once he became president he would prosecute Lafontant.

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Aristide's Economic Inheritance

Aristide is becoming increasingly aware of the need to be pragmatic as he tackles Haiti's substantial economic problems. Per capita GDP has fallen by 3 percent yearly since the 1987 election debacle, as the ensuing political turmoil led to cuts in foreign aid, deterred investors, and impaired effective policymaking. The consequent drop in public investment over this period was accompanied by a fall in private investment, which has impaired growth in the promising assembly-for-export sector. Haiti's manufacturing sector was the fastest-growing in the Caribbean in the 1970s, but manufactured exports rose slowly following Duvalier's ouster, and have slid by 4 percent over the last year. Agriculture--which employs 70 percent of the workforce--also has performed poorly, although its problems are more chronic. Deforestation, topsoil runoff, plant disease, and inadequate investment have prevented productivity from staying abreast of population growth. Export crops have suffered most; declines in coffee and sugar harvests have cut agricultural export earnings by more than 20 percent since 1986, and the trade deficit has risen from \$120 million in 1987 to \$180 million in 1990. Tourism has also been in decline. In addition, corruption is endemic at all levels of officialdom and has seriously hampered the efforts of previous governments to develop fiscal policy.

Aristide also will confront a substantial need for foreign aid. Haiti suffers from food and foreign currency shortages and public investment in health, education, and infrastructure is scanty. Currency reserves have nearly hit bottom, falling as low as \$1.6 million in July, and Haiti can afford oil only because Venezuela has been granting concessional credit terms. Meanwhile, USAID has calculated that Haiti will need at least 100,000 tons of donated cereal through June 1991, and the World Bank has estimated that an additional \$167 million is needed to fund a minimal investment program of \$361 million over the next two years.⁴ Aristide's advisers, for their part, realize that the demands of other nations and budget constraints will limit

⁴ USAID calculates that cereal donations have averaged about 60-70,000 tons a year since the November 1987 election murders.

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the funds available for Haiti, according to a generally reliable source. ~~SECRET~~

Aristide's economic program, reportedly drafted by a committee led by one of his leftist advisers, is largely inward-looking, statist, and agrarian, but less radical than his pulpit rhetoric, in our view. ~~SECRET~~

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His program says little about encouraging exports, but calls for prudent fiscal and monetary policies, excludes a direct government role in agricultural commerce, and affirms the need for competition in the domestic marketplace. Since the election, Aristide and his inner circle have struck a notably moderate tone. One close adviser has emphasized the need for the new government to work with business to create a productive economic climate, ~~SECRET~~

Businessmen have been generally receptive to Aristide's overtures but remain wary of his intentions. Most foreign and local businessmen have reacted cautiously to his victory and are waiting to see how his economic program evolves. They are hoping that the responsibilities of power will compel him to take a moderate course and are pleased by his commitment to reduce corruption. Nevertheless, at least one foreign investor--a Swiss firm preparing to invest \$20 million dollars in a Port au Prince hotel--has withdrawn since the election. ~~SECRET~~

A New Course in International Relations?

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Aristide seems willing to start off with a clean slate toward Washington, despite his reputation for anti-US ~~SECRET~~

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sentiments, and has moderated his anti-US rhetoric. [REDACTED]

Aristide says he recognizes the need for good bilateral relations with Washington. Nonetheless, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Aristide has long held the United States responsible for most of Haiti's problems; in particular, he blames Washington for supporting the Duvalier regime and contends that the 1987 election could have proceeded without violence, if the US Government had so desired. Moreover, many of his key advisers [REDACTED] are long-time leftists with anti-US sentiments. After the elections, however, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that the new government wants a "cooperative relationship" with Washington. [REDACTED]

Although his policies are likely to emphasize the importance of respect for Haitian sovereignty and sympathize with populist causes in the region, Aristide has signaled he will not embark on a major opening to leftist regimes. Aristide has mentioned Nicaragua and Cuba favorably as "models" for his planned massive literacy campaign, but the president-elect claims he will not "act precipitously" in renewing diplomatic relations with Havana. Nevertheless, Aristide has invited a Cuban delegation to attend his inauguration. [REDACTED]

Outlook

Aristide's moderate tone since the elections has probably generated sufficient calm among his opponents and the wary military to assure his near-term survival and that of his fledgling administration. Based on the military's recent success in controlling the far right, we believe that the hardline Duvalierists--Aristide's most powerful and strident enemies--are unlikely to move against him unless they conclude that the Army would condone such action. We judge that if the Duvalierist leadership calculates that the military intends to stand behind the new government, they probably will flee Haiti or go underground and continue plotting. Far right leaders may not be able to control all

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their followers, however, and an attack on Aristide by anxious mid- or low-level Duvalierists is possible.

Any evidence that Aristide is trying to consolidate his power at the expense of the Armed Forces almost certainly would prompt a revolt, in our view. For example, military support for Aristide would quickly erode if his new government followed through--with or without Cuban assistance--on plans to create and arm a parallel security force, a move that "Papa Doc" used to establish his dictatorship in the late 1950s. A widespread purge of the military or an accommodation with Cuba probably would yield a similar response.

In our view, Aristide's moderate tack is likely to continue at least over the next few months as he works to forge a government, but he probably would quickly resort to a more hardline stance if his agenda is frustrated. For example, he is likely to toughen his stance towards the military should it fail to arrest notorious rightwing leaders, such as Lafontant. In addition, should Aristide's political opponents secure a majority in the National Assembly, they could slow the pace of land and other reforms vital to his constituents. Under these conditions, Aristide probably would be inclined to resort to extra-constitutional actions, such as intimidation of legislators, to thwart the Assembly. Any of these actions, however, would provide Aristide's opponents, particularly in the military, with an excuse to topple his government under the guise of protecting the constitution.

On the economic front, we expect Aristide to enjoy a slightly more extended grace period. We believe that near-term economic hardships will be alleviated somewhat by increased allotments of foreign aid, although budget constraints in developed countries will limit available funds. Moreover, public calls for integrity in government and justice against the Duvalierists suggest that most Haitians expect Aristide to address longstanding political grievances first and will give him a longer grace period vis-a-vis the economy, which is likely to remain sluggish over the next year. Agricultural problems will take considerable time and investment to solve, and although export manufacturing and tourism could pick up more quickly, both probably will be dampened by the global economic downturn, and will be sensitive to Haiti's political climate and Aristide's policies.

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Implications for the US

While Washington's quick and positive response to Aristide's victory probably will encourage him to continue to moderate his tone toward the United States, his anti-US sentiments are deep-seated and he almost certainly will not be inclined to give Washington the benefit of the doubt if problems arise in the initial stages of the relationship. For Aristide, an early test of Washington's sincerity to cooperate with him will be US willingness to provide direct assistance to his government. In the absence of prompt aid, Aristide almost certainly will complain that Washington was intentionally trying to undermine his government. In the face of growing economic adversity, he might revert to anti-US rhetoric to maintain popular backing. Furthermore, Aristide might decide to make diplomatic overtures to the Cubans to signal his discontent, even though such an action would risk a backlash from the Haitian Armed Forces.

Aristide probably also would rethink bilateral cooperation in other areas, particularly if aid is slow to develop or if he believed his government was being pressured to accord Washington privileges that other nations have been unwilling to grant. For example, Aristide has voiced his displeasure with the Alien Migrant Interdiction Operation, and he may seek to curtail or eliminate it on the grounds that no other government has consented to such an agreement. International cooperation on drug trafficking, however, is more widespread and of greater concern to Aristide, suggesting that bilateral counternarcotics programs are less likely to be altered.

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Appendix

A Look at Aristide

Jean Bertrand Aristide has long had a reputation as a fiery leftist demagogue, but since beginning his drive for the presidency, he set aside his more strident rhetoric in favor of a more pragmatic posture. Aristide's more moderate political platform, reassuring messages to the Armed Forces, and expressions of gratitude to US officials for helping Haiti complete the electoral process suggest that, even if his approach is only a tactical move, he at least recognizes the importance of projecting a moderate image. Nevertheless, he almost certainly will continue to rely on his oratorical skills and the use of potent symbolism--as he did during the campaign--to sustain popular support for his presidency.

The potential disjunction between Aristide's recent moderate posture and his prior confrontational, outspoken leadership suggests, however, that he could be an erratic President, shifting between more measured efforts and calls to arms.



A survivor of numerous assassination attempts, Aristide has been attributed mystical powers by his supporters; his followers view him as a saviour, according to various sources. Nicknamed 'Titid' or 'little Aristide' the President-elect capitalizes on this aura by speaking in proverbs and parables and using easily understood folk symbolism and religious imagery to appeal to the superstitious and illiterate elements of Haitian society. Aristide adopted the rooster, with its implication of a fighting spirit, as his party's logo; he appeared at

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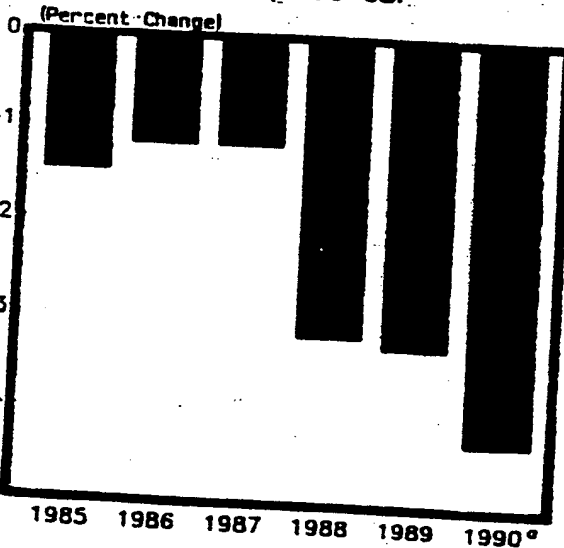
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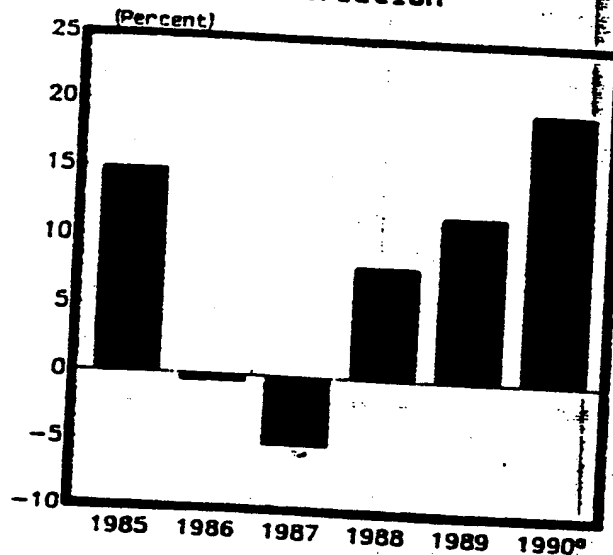
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Haiti: Economic Indicators

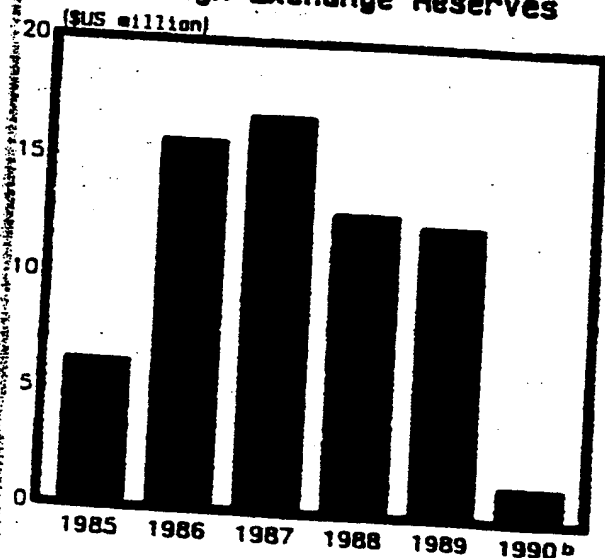
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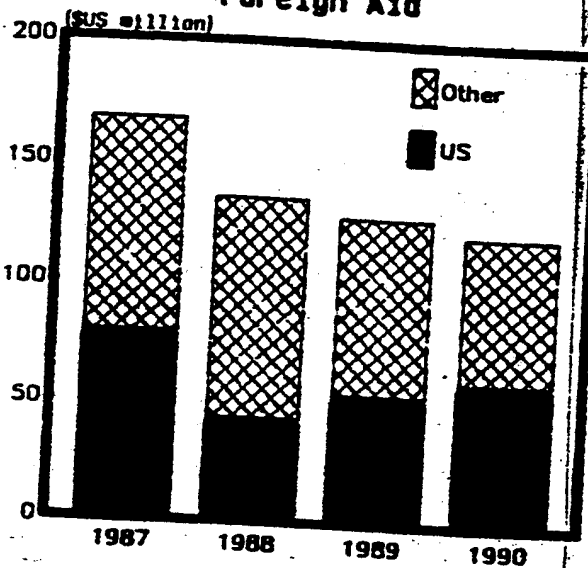
Inflation



Foreign Exchange Reserves



Foreign Aid



^a Estimated

^b As of July

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